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FRANCE-BERLIN: Paris continues to edge toward a more independent line in the Berlin negotiations.

In the first explicit statement to this effect, the two French diplomats involved in the Berlin talks recently said that the three Western allies should no longer follow the custom of agreeing on a common position prior to negotiating sessions with the Soviets. They argued that the Berlin talks have now entered a new phase, and that each Western ambassador should be free to negotiate directly with Soviet Ambassador Abrasimov. In addition, one of the diplomats stated that rather than meeting at specific intervals the ambassadors should move toward continuous sessions.

Whether these statements represent new French policy or are a trial balloon, they are in keeping with the recent thrust of French European policy. This appears to be aimed at regaining the initiative for Paris in the dialogue with Moscow by taking positions out in front of the Western allies on a variety of issues. The most recent example was the attempt by France at the Lisbon NATO ministerial meeting last week to modify the allied position that a successful outcome of the Berlin talks should be a precondition for multilateral preparations for a Conference on European Security.

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